

# Rehberg hears about logging, health issues

## Healthy Forest/ Healthy Community Task Force seeks money for health-care fund and log supply

U.S. Representative Denny Rehberg (R-Mont.) met Thursday, Aug. 29, with about 30 Libby community leaders to talk about possible funding for a long-term health care plan for area residents suffering from asbestos-related diseases, and about ways to increase the availability of logs from the Kootenai National Forest. The meeting was held at Libby City Hall from 4 to 5 p.m.

The gathering of the Healthy Forest/ Healthy Community Task Force was facilitated by Bruce Vincent of Communities for a Great Northwest. Other leaders who attended included Montana Representative Eileen Carney of House District 82, First



Bruce Vincent

National Bank President John Johanson, Rick Bass, a noted national author and representative of the Yaak Valley Forest Council, Lincoln County's three county commissioners, Libby Mayor Tony Berget, Libby City Council member George Bauer, Libby Area Chamber of Commerce executive director Janice Wood, St. John's Lutheran Hospital CEO Rick Palagi, Kootenai Forest Supervisor Bob Castaneda, Libby public schools administrator Kirby Maki, businessmen Bill Crismore, Terry Andreesen, Tom Wood, and several employees of Stimson Lumber Co.

Representatives of Stimson, the U.S. Forest Service and other forest-interest groups talked about the so-called "urban interface" — those portions of the Kootenai National Forest that surround or abut homes and businesses in Libby and Fortine — as a potential timber supply to help offset the timber shortage facing Stimson's Libby mill. That operation is the last large industrial facility in Libby and the town's largest private employer with a workforce of over 320 personnel.

"The people of Libby have suffered greatly from the contamination of the vermiculite mine," Mr. Rehberg said in a press release before the meeting. "As Montana's congressman, I intend to do all I can to help keep Libby on the road to recovery. A key part of that recovery is keeping the local economy viable."

Rehberg said, "The members of this community have worked hard to shape their own future. I'm excited to meet with everyone involved."

The Montanian obtained a draft of a letter from the group that asks Mr. Rehberg to help find the money to pay the costs of "the urgent need for an interim health care trust for Libby, Montana, until such time as this community has a satisfactory health care plan and White Lung Fund legislation is implemented ... A repository and disbursing mechanism exists already in the form of a not-for-profit

community corporation, Libby Asbestos Related Healthcare Project, Inc."

The group is also asking Mr. Rehberg to pass legislation and find money to expand logging in the urban interface areas of Libby and Fortine.

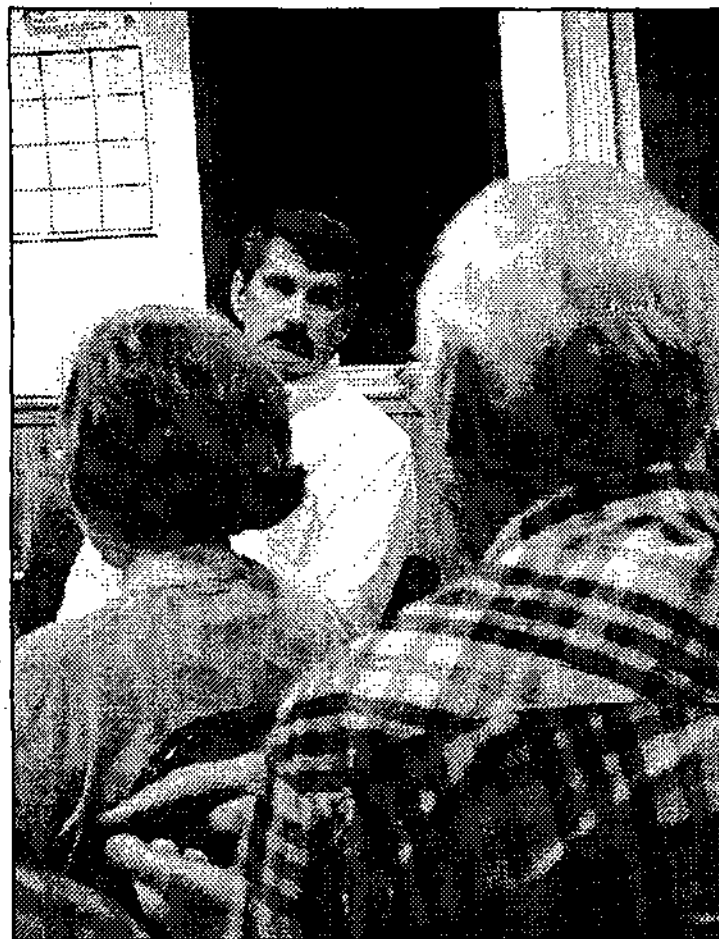
"As a result of meetings with the Timber Committee component of the task force, we are asking the [U.S. congressional] delegation for the following help with timber related issues:

- The Kootenai National Forest will plan and implement an urban interface fuels reduction program around the communities of Libby and Fortine to be completed by the fourth quarter of 2003. Estimated volume for the project will be between 5 million and 10 million board feet. About 1,000 acres of land near the urban interface are available. The Forest Service will need a \$1,000,000 supplemental appropriation to help pay for this project since it is in addition to their normal projects.

- The Kootenai National Forest requests authority to implement an additional Stewardship Project to help carry out the Urban Interface Plan.

- The Kootenai National Forest requests support for coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

- The Task Force states that there exists an opportunity for improvement in the appeals process allowing for expediency, trans-



Montanian photos by David F. Latham

### Group focused on forest, health issues

Bill Crismore of Libby, with back to camera, talks about log-supply issues with Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., at a meeting Aug. 29 in Libby. See related story on this page.

parency and balance.

- We are requesting \$100,000 for an urban interface forester employed by the county who would work with the Forest Service and urban landowners to mitigate fuel loads.

The letter was to have been

drafted and mailed to Mr. Rehberg on Friday, Aug. 30.

(Editor's note: The portions of the letter quoted above are from a rough draft and may have been worded differently in the final letter.)

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